

SCULPTING THE WIND: ALEXA KING & THE MAKING  
OF THE BARBARO MEMORIAL STATUE

A CREATIVE PROJECT

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BY

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## Part 1: Problem

In the spring of 2006, the thoroughbred racing world was thrilled by a scintillating performance in the Kentucky Derby. An undefeated horse named Barbaro won the race by the largest margin since 1946. Hopes of gaining new public attention toward the sport with talk of a potential Triple Crown arose throughout the horse racing industry. Within just a few weeks, that attention became a reality, but not due to a Triple Crown possibility. In the first few moments of the Preakness Stakes, the second of the three Triple Crown races, Barbaro shattered his right hind ankle. In the weeks and months following the injury, Barbaro drew national media attention as well as a huge fan following. People from around the world became attached to his story and eagerly awaited news on how his recovery was progressing. As one Associated Press article stated, “The 2006 Kentucky Derby winner’s fight for survival was their fight, a symbol of strength, courage, and comfort - and, more than anything else, a source of inspiration” (nbcsports.com). Despite the hopes of all, Barbaro lost his battle for life on January 29, 2007, eight months after his initial injury.

After his death, Barbaro’s fans anxiously awaited news as to where he would be buried. After nearly a year of waiting, Barbaro’s owners, Roy and Gretchen Jackson, made the announcement that his ashes would be interred at Churchill Downs in Louisville, Kentucky, and that an artist named Alexa King had been commissioned to create his memorial. *Sculpting the Wind* is the story of Alexa King’s journey in creating this important memorial.

Alexa King was born in Muncie, Indiana, and spent her youth training and riding ponies and horses throughout central Indiana. As a teenager, her family moved to

Edinburgh, Indiana, onto Camp Atterbury where her father was the head of the military camp. Alexa spent her time honing her talents for her two favorite passions, riding her horses on base and attending art classes in Indianapolis. She returned to Muncie for college, attending Ball State University in the art department. It was there where she discovered sculpture and with her new passion, she moved out west to study the bronze processes in the foundries. As time passed, she combined her love of horses with her passion for sculpture and became a renowned equestrian artist. While she was already a popular artist in the equestrian art world, she did not obtain public popularity until her creation of the Barbaro Memorial Statue.

Barbaro became more of a hero for his battles off the track than for his triumphs on the track. While most of the mainstream media stories ended after his death, Barbaro's fans remained loyal and followed anything related to him. The Barbaro fans became somewhat of a new culture, grasping onto anything that was associated with the horse. A group called the "FOBs," or "Fans of Barbaro," developed to keep Barbaro's memory alive by assisting with horse rescues and raising funds for equine health research. During Barbaro's recovery, an employee from Fair Hill Training Center (where Barbaro had been based), Alex Brown, posted daily updates on Barbaro via trainer Tim Wooley's website. Eventually, he created his own website, Alex Brown Racing (ABR) and it became the official home for the Fans of Barbaro. According to ABR, the group consists of "3,000 to 5,000 people that have rescued more than 3,400 horses and raised over 1.3 million dollars" ([alexbrownracing.com](http://alexbrownracing.com)). Beyond the continuing fan bases, countless books and a few documentaries were produced about Barbaro, but none focused on the story following his death. This is why *Sculpting the Wind* is significant.

It continues on with the events that the public became so attached to during Barbaro's recovery time.

While the societal and public importance of *Sculpting the Wind* has been touched upon, it is equally important to understand the basis for the documentary from a communications standpoint. *Sculpting the Wind* is about a statue, but does an inanimate object depicting a moment in time have greater meaning (story) beyond that captured time? Using the digital method of documentary storytelling, the goal of *Sculpting the Wind* is to tell the stories represented in the non-traditional narrative form of the Barbaro Memorial Statue. Not only does the statue represent a famous moment in horse racing history, but it also signifies an achievement in art, as well as achievements in equine health and rescue. In this document, which serves as an accompaniment to *Sculpting the Wind*, I will propose that the documentary does indeed create a unique, digital story based on the statue. This will be confirmed by addressing some of the previous media works on Barbaro, discussing the form of digital technology used in *Sculpting the Wind*, and then arguing that the Barbaro Memorial Statue is a form of epideictic storytelling using Lawrence Rosenfield's commentary, *A Practical Celebration of Epideictic*. Lastly, I will go over a few of the limitations of *Sculpting the Wind*.

## **Part 2: Review of Published Works/Previous Creative Projects Related to Topic**

Because Barbaro was such a popular horse while racing, there are many published works about him. Countless newspaper, magazine, and web articles relating to Barbaro can easily be found. There are also many books on Barbaro and a few video programs are available that report his story. The majority of these examples focus on his racing career or his fight for life after his injury in the Preakness Stakes. Few forms of media

focus on the specific story of his gravesite, and only one video example previous to *Sculpting the Wind* comes close to telling it.

First, this paper will focus on many of the printed articles on Barbaro. Many of the articles on Barbaro discuss and comment on his racing days. Barbaro was certainly an impressive, newsworthy horse long before his injury, or even his Derby win, became the dominant tale. As an article in the newspaper, *USA Today*, stated:

“Race after race, Barbaro has proven to be perhaps the most versatile colt in the game... In five weeks, more challenges await: Barbaro will try to become the third horse since Seattle Slew in 1977 to win the Derby with an unbeaten record (Smarty Jones did it in 2004); and he'll try to become the first horse to win it off a five-week layoff since Needles in 1956” (usatoday.com).

It can certainly be said that Barbaro had a stirred up of hope and excitement around him prior to his Derby win. This became even stronger after his dominating six-and-a-quarter lengths win. The cover of the Kentucky Derby issue of *The Bloodhorse*, a racing industry magazine, proclaimed his performance a “Show Stopper.” Ray Paulick of *The Bloodhorse* further stated, “Barbaro has so many things in his favor, it’s hard to bet against him” (*The Bloodhorse*, #19, 2006). Many other articles from this time period focused on his brilliance on the racetrack.

Once the Preakness Stakes occurred, the type of focus on Barbaro changed dramatically. After Barbaro shattered his right hind leg in that race, the media attention rose to new levels. He became more than just a horse racing story; he became a daily, national story. Whether the coverage was in newspapers, magazines, or on live TV segments such as NBC’s *Today Show*, Barbaro was a huge

story. Through this coverage, the nation became attached to Barbaro. By the time Barbaro had lost his battle for life eight months later, he had become a media darling. In an article from ESPN's website, sportswriter Jay Conley stated it best: "Barbaro's death is not for the sports pages. It goes on Page One and also Editorial. People who haven't been to a horse race in their lives feel undone by the loss" (espn.com).

Because of the huge following Barbaro attracted during his recovery, many books and several video programs were released following his death. Books such as, *Barbaro, A Nation's Love Story*, *Barbaro: The Horse that Captured America's Heart*, and *My Guy Barbaro* were written recounting his racing talents as well as his struggle and eventual loss of life. A few documentary videos were even produced. NBC Sports produced, *Barbaro: A Nation's Horse*. This documentary primarily focused on the heartbreak of his injury and death. While it was an emotional piece due to the topic, it was obviously produced quickly and in a news style. Many of the same video shots were repeated throughout the half-hour program and the script was very matter-of-fact and to the point using narration throughout. In a sense, the production was somewhat cold and left this viewer wanting more from the experience.

Another documentary, *Barbaro*, was produced by HBO. This film was better than the NBC documentary because it allowed those directly involved with Barbaro to tell the story making it more emotional and personal. Also, it was written in a formal documentary style rather than a news story format used in the NBC

documentary. Both documentaries, however, focused only on the horse's recovery struggles and the heartbreak of his loss. Both were produced long before the Barbaro Statue was even a reality.

The one video piece that comes closest to *Sculpting the Wind* is a news-magazine style, two-minute story done by KET-TV in Lexington, Kentucky, for its show, *Louisville Life*. While this story did discuss Alexa King and her creation of the Barbaro Memorial Statue, it did not do so in much detail. It only included b-roll of the current statue and some additional footage of Alexa working on a dog statue in her studio, as well as an interview with Alexa. This video story was only a small sampling of what *Sculpting the Wind* was able to tell.

After briefly reviewing a sampling of what had previously been done in the media on Barbaro, it became obvious that *Sculpting the Wind* is a unique and important story to tell. Many early news stories on Barbaro showed the importance of the talented horse to the racing industry, while later articles, books, and videos told the heartbreaking story that captured the nation's attention. None of them focused on the story beyond Barbaro's death as *Sculpting the Wind* has done. Only KET's brief story on Alexa King told a similar tale; however, due to its time limits and resulting lack of detail, it cannot compare to *Sculpting the Wind*.

### **Part 3: Methods**

The type of storytelling used in *Sculpting the Wind* was historical documentary for television. The techniques and methods used may be compared to a Ken Burns-style documentary. As Rose and Corley state: "Burns chooses to

engage the audience by tapping into the emotional feelings that seem to emanate from the collision of individuals and events and moments in American history and trying to translate those feelings for the general public” (51). This certainly can be said for *Sculpting the Wind's* documentary techniques as well. After studying existing works on Barbaro, it became obvious the back story would not need further focus due to the media storm that occurred with Barbaro. As a result, the first two minutes give a brief summary of the Barbaro story and tie that to the tale that would be told in *Sculpting the Wind*. This opening was done using a montage of still imagery and footage from 2006 and included narration recounting the events of Barbaro's life. The rest of the story is told without narration and is spoken by those directly involved with Alexa King while she was creating the Barbaro Memorial Statue. In the original plans for the documentary, Roy and Gretchen Jackson, Barbaro's owners, were to be interviewed, but that was soon ruled out, since they no longer give interviews relating to Barbaro. After the Jacksons declined, it was decided the documentary would focus on the personal side of sculpting the memorial and honed in on those that were closest to Alexa during the creation process (in this case, her husband, daughter, an employee at the Kentucky Derby Museum, and the foundry manager). This gave the documentary a more personal feel, which was designed to help draw the audience into the storyline.

One aspect of this documentary that stood out from previous film making experiences was that everything discussed in the film had already occurred prior to the start of this project. As a result, this documentary relied heavily on the use of



still photography rather than b-roll shot by the crew. This proved to be a bit of a challenge, particularly with a student budget, but through the use of several online photo-hosting services, particularly Flickr, original photos of Barbaro were found and proper permissions were given for their usage. The main “character” in the film, Alexa King, also provided ample drawings, renderings, and photos from the design and sculpting process. Additional photos were provided by several “FOBs” and from the Kentucky Derby Museum. Because much of the film used the “Ken Burns-Effect” style of zooming and panning photos (Rose and Cronley, 50), some additional areas of the documentary that could have been filmed, were shot with a still camera. Specific examples of this were the photos of Muncie and the imagery from the Indiana State Fairgrounds. This was done to create continuity throughout the documentary. The remaining necessary live action b-roll was shot by hiring a production crew in Colorado for coverage of the foundry, as well as some local filming of equestrians, horses and some footage of Alexa sculpting. Extensive use of the producer’s photography collection and personal footage shot in 2006 at the Kentucky Derby were also integral parts of completing the project.

Specific patterns were integrated into the script of the documentary to assist the audience through the story. The progression of the building of the statue was separated into distinct sections of the documentary. The visual cues for these sections came in the form of quotations that related to the upcoming section. This allowed members of the audience to collect themselves after a particularly emotional moment and to prepare them to move forward in the story.

Music was an integral component of this production. For the most part, production music from a catalog collection was used, but a few select pieces were chosen for specific purposes. One piece in particular was used as a “Barbaro Theme” and was placed in sections that needed to emphasize emotion and the memory of Barbaro. Other production scores were used again to emphasize certain emotions and direct the tone of that section of the storyline.

Not all of the music used was production music. Two pieces were custom written for use in *Sculpting the Wind*. The first piece, “*Banks of the Wabash*” was heard during the segment on Alexa’s life growing up in Indiana. This piece was written and performed by Kris Hensler. A modern version of Indiana’s state song was created to re-emphasize the local connections in Alexa’s story. The very last piece heard in the documentary, “*I Love to Run*,” was written and performed by Nashville recording artist, Templeton Thompson, who volunteered her time to create a song specifically for the documentary. The song assists in ending the documentary on a happy note.

#### **Part 4: Non-Traditional Narrative and Sculpting the Wind**

*Sculpting the Wind* tackles a complex subject. The basis for the storyline in *Sculpting the Wind* is a larger than life-sized (1.25 life) sculpture of a horse. This particular statue captures a moment in time, specifically that of Barbaro winning the Kentucky Derby. It also serves as gravesite for Barbaro. Because it captures a moment, the statue itself is a non-traditional type of narrative. The story is not written or spoken words. Similar to a photo, that statue captures no future or past,

so how does an object like this tell a story? Considering communications theory, the closest type of storytelling that could be associated with this statue would be epideictic oratory or storytelling. As defined by Lawrence Rosenfield's more modern definition, epideictic rhetoric's aim is to celebrate, "Being" (132-133). He goes on to say that it may be "thought of as acknowledgement, the recognition of what is (goodness, grace, intrinsic excellence) or the refusal to so recognize in a moment of social inspiration. The experience afforded the participants is the opportunity of beholding reality impartially as witnesses of Being" (133). An outstanding example of this type of speech is a funeral oration. This seems quite fitting for the Barbaro Memorial Statue. The statue in a sense speaks for itself, showing a horse in his prime, with all four feet off of the ground in a triumphant finish. It oozes greatness and upon viewing it, the viewer can almost feel the power of the horse running down the track as he gallops to his most triumphant win. It indeed makes a statement to the greatness of the horse that is buried there. It is a form of funerary oratory through the moment it represents and the image it conjures. Lawrence Rosenfield's interpretation of epideictic further confirms this. He says:

"Epideictic is unique among public address types in that it lets be what lies before us so that we may acknowledge the radiance that is present to us.

Second, epideictic's effort to acknowledge Being's radiance enables the listener who approaches what is in a spirit of appreciative attention... Third, there is a distinctive form of understanding evoked in epideictic

celebration... Epideictic's understanding calls upon us to join with our community in giving thought to what we witness, and such thoughtful beholding in commemoration constitutes memorializing" (133).

While the Barbaro Memorial Statue is not a form of speech per se, it does communicate messages in a similar manner to epideictic rhetoric. When a viewer approaches the statue, there are feelings of awe, amazement, and beauty. The statue appeals to the viewer's emotions. The depicted horse is powerful, strong, and fast. A viewer would not have to be a fan of horse racing to understand that the animal buried at the site was great. So it is this story that comes from viewing the statue. It is indeed a story that memorializes and honors the greatness and superiority of Barbaro.

#### **Part 5: Limitations and Final Overview**

Applying the epideictic form of rhetoric to the Barbaro Memorial Statue does have its limitations, particularly when in reference to the *Sculpting the Wind* project. Epideictic in the form used here, is a form of ceremonial story and while indeed the Barbaro Memorial Statue does celebrate Barbaro's greatness on the track in that captured moment, there is more meaning behind the statue than what is simply shown. The greater meaning behind the statue is most affected by the background of the viewer looking at the statue. A racing fan may see the statue and remember certain things such as Barbaro's dominating performances in his races. Another viewer, perhaps an "FOB," may look at it and have thoughts of Barbaro's struggle to overcome his injury. Yet another viewer that has no prior knowledge of Barbaro

may simply see what stands before them: an amazing and powerful horse. There are also limitations in specifically assigning epideictic rhetoric to *Sculpting the Wind* as a whole. The funerary type rhetoric is only a small portion and back-story to *Sculpting the Wind*. The documentary also focuses on the artist that created his statue and her journey while creating the memorial. If epideictic storytelling is to be attached to *Sculpting the Wind*, then perhaps a slightly different definition of epideictic storytelling is needed. In this case, it would simply be a celebratory story. Indeed, *Sculpting the Wind* would fit this description: it is not only a celebration of Barbaro and his impressive statue, but also a celebration of Alexa King.

Further limitations on the *Sculpting the Wind* project as a whole are those related to documentary filmmaking. When producing a show for television there is always the limitation of time. Whether a documentary lasts an hour or a half hour, there will always be parts of the story missing. Another limitation was the omission of interviews with Barbaro's owners. As previously mentioned, this was not possible due to the Jacksons' wish to no longer grant interviews discussing Barbaro. While it would have been ideal to interview them, it did make the documentary more of a personal and up-close look at the creation of the statue.

The creative project, *Sculpting the Wind*, continues on with a story that has national significance. Barbaro was, according to various multi-media sources, "the Nation's Horse." While many of these media outlets covered Barbaro's racing career as well as his fight for life following his injury, none told the story following his death or the creation of his memorial site. One short video piece from the television

show, *Louisville Life*, briefly covered the topic, but with only a two-minute duration, very little of the story was actually told. Because none of the previously existing media outlets had covered the creation of the Barbaro Memorial Statue as closely and personally, *Sculpting the Wind* is a unique piece of documentary work. The storytelling techniques used in *Sculpting the Wind* not only follow closely those seen in documentary films directed by Ken Burns, but also uses storytelling qualities found in epideictic rhetoric. The meaning of the Barbaro Memorial Sculpture differs depending on the viewer's perspective, but at its core is a celebration of the great horse Barbaro. Using his back-story as well as that of artist Alexa King, *Sculpting the Wind: Alexa King and the Making of the Barbaro Memorial Statue* is an important, celebratory piece of digital storytelling.

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